


THE GROUND OF MORALS.

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THE GROUND OF MORALS.

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IX.

A

# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE

## THE GRADUATING CLASS

OF THE

COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON,

AT THEIR REQUEST,

IN THE COLLEGE CHAPEL,

MARCH 28TH, 1852.

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BY REV. PROF. J. W. MILES.

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PUBLISHED BY THE CLASS.

CHARLESTON, S. C.

JOHN RUSSELL, 256 KING-STREET.

1852.

CHARLESTON:

STEAM POWER-PRESS OF WALKER AND JAMES,  
101, 103 and 105 East-Bay.

TO  
THE CLASS OF 1852,  
THIS DISCOURSE IS COMMITTED,  
WITH A DEEP SENSE OF ITS MANIFOLD DEFICIENCIES,  
AS A TESTIMONY OF RESPECT AND AFFECTION,  
BY THE AUTHOR.



## THE GROUND OF MORALS.

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HEARKEN unto me, ye men of understanding !  
Far be it from God that he should do wickedness !  
And from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity !  
For the work of a man shall he render unto him,  
And cause every man to find according to his ways.  
Yea, surely God will not do wickedly,  
Neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.

Job, xxxiv. 10, 11, 12.

AMONG the various capacities with which the Creator has ennobled man, and which are his insignia of royalty among the creatures of this planet, there is none more noble than the faculty which he possesses of investigating the grounds of his duty, or, in other words, the Law of his Moral Relations. It is his privilege, not merely to be the creature of Law, but to ascertain the nature and reason of the Laws which bind him, and, consequently, to perform the noblest service by a voluntary conformity to the Laws of which he is the subject. Those Laws, if violated or neglected, will exact a necessary retribution or compel a mechanical obedience. But man is endowed with the capacity of discerning the reason in which they are founded, and hence, of not merely submitting to a mechanical obedience, but of choosing a moral conformity to arrangements which are the dictates of Supreme Reason. The power of the Deity could enforce a blind submission to



the arrangements of his wisdom ; the benevolence of that wisdom has placed within the comprehension of the creature, the reasonableness of the demands which are made upon his obedience, in order that, like his Great Creator, he may be crowned with the glory of voluntary rectitude. It is the highest glory of the Deity that he is Just and Good, not by any physical necessity, but by the rectitude of his Will, which renders it morally impossible for him to do otherwise than Right: and since finite, feeble man, although created after the likeness of God, is unable, through the influence of sin, to maintain that perfect voluntary rectitude, the merciful Creator has furnished in the provisions of Redemption, the means whereby the creature may still vindicate his title to that royal likeness in which he was created, and in Jesus Christ may voluntarily submit his will to the will of God, and render the intelligent service of a reasonable being.

We are not always able to discover the reason of the Laws which the Deity has established, or rather, we can in no case fathom the reason of their constitution, as it exists as a motive originally in the mind of the Creator; but we can always perceive their reasonableness, or conformity to the principles of Reason, and hence the justice and propriety, as well as the duty, of obedience. Thus, while we may not discover the reason *why* the Creator has constituted the Universe as it exists; we both may and ought to investigate the reason of our duty, or, in other words, the Grounds wherein is founded the Law of our Moral Relations. And, surely, a nobler theme could scarcely be selected for the contemplation of thoughtful and earnest men, who are about to enter upon the great drama of life, at a



period of unparalleled restlessness, when the maxims of expediency and the theories of daring speculation are enveloping and threatening to shake in stormy clouds, those eternal and changeless principles which must be maintained at all hazards, and the abandonment of which is treason to the cause of Truth and God.

The many varying Systems of Morals which have been put forth by individuals or by different schools of Philosophy, may all be distributed into three general classes, and these indeed may be further reduced to two, according to the principle which they assume as the ground of all Moral Law.

First, we may class together those who base all Moral Distinctions on Authority, or who hold that those distinctions are not founded in the nature of things, but depend upon the Law of the Supreme Power or upon Mutual Compact. To this class are to be referred, among the Ancients, such philosophers as Archelaus, Socrates' master, who affirmed that "Just and Dishonest are not so by Nature, but by Law"; Democritus, Aristippus, Anaxarchus, Pyrrho, Epicurus, Carneades, etc.; and this opinion being abhorrent to the ancient Fathers of the Christian Church, was first formally revived and defended in modern times, by the great schoolman Ockham, who was soon followed by Peter Alliacus, Andreas de Novo Castro, and others; and in still later times it was supported by Hobbes, and is the implied basis of still later moralists even of the present day.

The second class includes those who make Expediency the rule of Morals, or who hold that Moral Distinctions are based in reasons of Utility, or of The Greatest Good of the Greatest Number, or of Individual

Happiness. Among the class of ancient philosophers already alluded to, are found those who supported such views ; and in modern times to this class must be referred the great and venerable name of Locke, his ardent admirer, Abraham Tucker, David Hume, Doctor Paley, Jeremy Bentham, and others.

The third class embraces those who hold that Moral Distinctions are founded in the nature of things, that their relations are immutable, that 'Right and Wrong are eternally unchangeable in their nature. To this class belong such names as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hooker, Butler—the author of the immortal "Analogy,"—Ralph Cudworth, and a host who might be mentioned ; but the sanction of the greatest name ought not to make error acceptable ;—the want of the authority of names cannot affect the everlasting Principles of Truth founded upon the immoveable basis of Supreme Reason.

The first two classes of Moralists which have been mentioned, may be placed in the same category, and thus the investigation may be simplified and abridged. For, if Authority be the ground of Morals, they then ultimately depend upon Will, and the question must arise, by what is that Will directed ? If it be only arbitrary, or be merely guided by considerations of utility or convenience, then Morals must shift their relation as that Will or those considerations may vary ; and before the determination of that governing Will is made, things must be indifferent, neither moral nor immoral, if Morality depends only upon the preceptive power. In like manner, if Morals are grounded upon Expediency, they shift their relation as often as the circumstances regulating Expediency may change ; and

the question arises, is there any thing or rule whereby certain things are always expedient, or best under all circumstances? If there be not, then again things must be indifferent, neither moral nor immoral, until circumstances may have determined their expediency. It is evident then that the whole question as to The Ground of Morals becomes reduced to this—Is there any fixed, immutable, eternal Rule of Right upon which Morals rest and by which they are determined, or is their standard variable? In other words, to bring out clearly the point which separates into two great classes—notwithstanding any minor differences—all Systems of Morals, the question may be shaped thus—Are Moral Distinctions founded in the nature of things, or do they depend upon Will and Compact?

The universal possession of Conscience, the sense of Moral Obligation which characterizes humanity, the recognition by the human race of the existence of such things as Justice and Injustice, Honest and Dishonest, Right and Wrong, indicate that there is some distinction in these things perceptible by Reason, and hence founded upon universal principles; which is much the same as saying that it exists in the nature of things. But a difficulty is started to this, namely, that the convictions of the human race respecting what things are to be regarded as Just and Unjust, Right and Wrong, or Moral and Immoral, are of the most varying and contradictory character. Aristotle, for instance, reports—"Some there are that think there is no other Just or Unjust but what is made by Law and men, because that which is natural is immutable and hath everywhere the same force, as fire burns alike here and

in Persia ; but they see that *jura* and *justa*,\* rights and just things, are every where different."

Now this objection is not altogether true ; it is founded upon a confusion and an oversight. The confusion is, in not distinguishing between the National Law or Custom, and the Natural Law or dictate of Reason. The peculiar Law or Custom of the specific nation may, in certain particulars, even violate the Natural Law of Reason or Affection, without thereby proving that the nation in question possesses no sense or recognition of the latter. On the contrary, as all human Law must spring originally from the nature and constitution of man, the National Law must have arisen from that basis, and owed its peculiar form to a thousand modifying circumstances ; while in the very thing wherein it violates that Natural or Universal Law, it may bear evidence of its original foundation thereon. For example, the peculiar National Law which allowed the parent to exercise absolute power over the life of his child, and to expose it as an outcast if he was unable to maintain it, evidently recognized, implicitly, the natural duties of filial obedience and parental protection, even while outraging the one and violating the other. The distinction, moreover, between the Natural and the National Law was recognized distinctly by the ancient Pagans. The sum of their opinions hereon may be expressed in the words of the great jurist Gaius, whose Institutes formed the basis of those of Justinian : " All people," says he, " who are governed by laws and customs, make use partly of their own peculiar law and partly of that which is common to all men. For that law which each people hath established for itself, is the peculiar law of that State ; but that

\* τὰ δὲ δίκαια κινούμενα ὑπῶσι.



which natural reason hath established among all men, that is equally observed among all people, and is called the Law of Nations, as being that law which all nations employ."

It is, then, historically certain that there has ever been among nations a recognition of certain general principles of Justice and Right, which have not been settled by any convention or compact, but are the convictions of the general reason of man, and hence have their foundation in the constitution or nature of things. In the striking language of Philo—"Right Reason is the truthful law, not established by this or that mortal, corruptible upon parchment, or soulless upon lifeless pillars, but stamped incorruptible by the Immortal Nature upon the immortal intellect." Or, to quote the excellent definition of Grotius—"Natural Law is the dictate of right Reason, indicating that moral turpitude or moral necessity exists in a certain act, from its agreement or disagreement with that rational nature itself, and consequently that such an act is forbidden or commanded by God, the Author of Nature."

The oversight involved in the objection reported by Aristotle, consists in completely overlooking the office of Conscience. The most diverse views may be held by different individuals, with regard to the specific requisitions of Duty, and the particular facts which are to be referred to the respective domains of Right and Wrong, and Conscience nevertheless may most faithfully and truly perform its office in the case of each. The reason is obvious,—it is because Conscience is a formal and sanctioning power. It is the intuitive conviction of there being actually such distinctions as Right and Wrong, and hence of accountability to a

Moral Law. But the material of that Law,—the facts or propositions which are to be referred to the fundamental distinctions of Right and Wrong,—must be decided by the Judgment acting upon the degree of information afforded to the Understanding. The moment that the Understanding pronounces a moral judgment upon the presented fact, in affirming that *this* is Right or Wrong, immediately Conscience spontaneously acts, to command, upon its sense of accountability, obedience to the judgment. If, therefore, the Understanding be but partially enlightened or be misinformed, the Judgment will doubtless pronounce amiss; but the sense of accountability requires it to pronounce, and when it does so, the voice of Conscience imperatively commands the performance of the duty, or forbids the commission of the wrong. If we even wilfully pervert the Understanding, and wickedly reverse the names of Good and Evil, still that solemn voice—until it is utterly smothered by the moral suicide—will cry in the depths of his being—amidst his most secret convictions—that Right and Wrong are real distinctions, that he is accountable to a Moral Law, and that Duty can only be neglected at his peril. The Judgment itself, furnishes no material of knowledge—it is regulative—and it could not act unless conceptions were formed by the Understanding; but when the Understanding furnishes this material, the importance of the office of the Judgment is at once apparent. So the Conscience as a sanctioning principle, while furnishing no material for the formation of conceptions, gives a vital power to the moral decisions of the Judgment, and suffers them not to remain mere intellectual processes. Its awful voice echoes in man his intuitive con-

victions, of the reality of the distinctions between Right and Wrong, and hence of responsibility,—of his amenability to a Moral Law, and his consequent dread prerogative of relation to an invisible Lawgiver, the author of his wondrous being and the just claimant of his Duty.

This view of Conscience has anticipated a remark which might be made by some, namely, that if this terrible power, then, does not enlighten the Judgment, its universal operation does not itself prove that there are certain specific principles of Morals universally recognized by man, since it still operates, even where the most diverse views prevail as to what facts are Right or Wrong. Assuredly this is so; as, on the other hand, its being silenced, or its sanctions being perverted to false views of Right and Duty, can never prove that man is not accountable, or that he does not possess convictions that there is a Right and Wrong,—that there is a Moral Law to which he is amenable,—and that he is the subject of Duty. The objection, then, mentioned by Aristotle, fails. The existence of the most various and contradictory views as to what things are to be referred to the distinction of Right and Wrong, neither conflicts with the universal validity of Conscience, nor with the existence in the Reason of an antecedent ground as the necessary condition of the reference of any facts to that fundamental distinction, nor, further, does it prove that there are not, amidst all the particular differences, certain Universal Moral Principles, originally stamped upon the nature of man. But it is in the sphere of Reason that we are to seek what are the universal moral convictions of humanity,—that natural Law, whose intuitively recognized enactments



are "stamped incorruptible by the Immortal Nature upon the immortal intellect." And thus it becomes easy to detect that sophistry which would shelter error, neglect, or wickedness, under the specious plea of conscientious conviction: for it is evident that it is no less an imperative duty to inform the Understanding, by every means within the reach of the individual, as to what is Truth, Right, and Duty, than it is to act conscientiously upon that information, after it has been carefully obtained, and has thus enabled the Judgment to pronounce a decision.

It is not any part of my design to enumerate the specific principles of the Moral Law. When analyzed, they will be found to be based upon unchanging truths of universal and unvarying applicability. What to-day and here is man's duty to God, and is essential for the preservation and purity of the family and social relations, must have been so from the beginning of human nature, and will be always and everywhere found to be so, while man is the subject of a changeless Deity, and is, by the laws of his being, a social creature. I pass this by, then, with the single remark, as well worthy of observation, that even those who have denied the existence of any natural morality whatever, and have reduced all morals to mere custom and expediency, have nevertheless agreed to a very remarkable extent, with moralists generally, as to what things it is expedient for society invariably to regard as moral and immoral.

The principles of the Moral Law are so universally applicable, and so universally expedient for promoting, when observed, the best condition of society, that it is highly reasonable to suppose that they must be founded

in some universal principle of Reason based upon the nature or constitution of things. And if this supposition be correct, if Morals are founded in the eternal and immutable distinction of Right and Wrong,—if there is a changeless Rule of Rectitude whereby Morals are directed and determined,—then we should expect that as a moral, accountable being, held by Conscience amenable to Duty, man would perceive by Reason the principles upon which Duty is based; or, in other words, that there is a Natural Law written by the Creator in the Reason of the creature. Perverted that creature may become in his affections,—corrupted in his nature, so far as to require the special interposition of the Creator for the moral restoration and salvation of the fallen creature; but if that rational perception of Moral Law be denied him, which is the very condition of the operation of Conscience and of a sense of accountability, there is left nothing in him to which any moral appeal can be made, and he can know no morality beyond obedience to specific precepts. Where no special precept exists, all would be indifferent except as expediency or interest might determine. Nothing could be *per se* moral or immoral to him, but could only be so regarded because, and in so far as, it was commanded or forbidden by Revelation; and where he was without Revelation, having no Moral Law written in his Reason, he would be accountable to no law of Duty, and would be the irresponsible creature of mere expediency and passion. We may safely affirm that the known facts with regard to the nature and convictions of man, are entirely at variance with such a supposition, and that the declaration of the Apostle Paul will be always found supported by the

history of man, namely, that the Gentiles are a law unto themselves, having the work of the Law written in their hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness.

But if it appears that there is a Natural Law, recognized by the general Reason of man, whose principles are everywhere the same, it still remains to be more fully enquired, what are the grounds of that Law, or whether moral Good and Evil, Just and Unjust, Honest and Dishonest, Right and Wrong, are such in the eternal nature of things, or are the arbitrary distinctions of the Governing Will. If the latter be the case, it is then evident that what to-day is immoral because forbidden, may at a future time become moral because commanded, and *vice versa*. But surely a distinction must be made, between what is lawful or unlawful because it is the subject of precept from an authority possessing jurisdiction in the matter, and what is moral or immoral, and is commanded or forbidden because it is right or wrong. It cannot be denied that there are things indifferent in themselves, which become *debita* or *illicita*, obligatory or unlawful, because enjoined or forbidden by competent authority; but when the reasons of expediency which gave rise to the law become altered or no longer of force, then unquestionably those same things may entirely alter their relations. They possess no moral character, and the relations of Right and Wrong are not affected by such things being now permitted, though formerly forbidden, or the reverse. In the transgression of the law in case of such things, the fault is not in the commission of the thing itself, but lies in the violation of the duty owed to the authority which enacts the law, and in the possible consequences to others; for that relation of duty remain-

ing unchanged, a change of the law may entirely alter the relation of the individual to the same things; so that it is evident that the fault cannot consist in the mere doing or not doing of such things in themselves considered. But the great principles of the Natural Law, upon which all human law is founded, being unchangeable and uniformly binding,—applicable universally, independent of the variable and contingent,—involve in their infraction the guilt of the violator, independent of any formal precept, as the universal Reason and Conscience of man testify. It is not necessary to prove here, what has become an axiom of Jurisprudence, that no precept, enforced even by a legal authority, can make that Right which the Natural Law condemns as Wrong.

But it may be said, granting all this,—granting that there is a natural Right and Wrong not depending upon the created will; yet as that Natural Law itself depends upon and emanated from God, who chose so to constitute man, that therefore Right and Wrong are, after all, the creatures of arbitrary Will;—that what the Moral Law enjoins, is Right merely because it is enjoined by God,—what it forbids, is Wrong only because it is so forbidden. The consequences entailed by this position must make us shrink from admitting the premises which involve them. By the recipients of Revelation a fact must certainly be regarded as Right or Wrong because it is declared so to be by God; but this conviction rests upon confidence in God's revealed character. Widely different is the other position which was stated. If that position were true, then before the constitution of the Universe all things would have been indifferent, and had God willed that



the Natural Law written in the Reason of man and sanctioned by his Conscience should have approved parricide, then parricide would have become Right and Moral, and the son who did *not* murder his father would have been a worthy object of moral reprobation. And should it please the Deity now to give a new declaration of Law, whereby he willed the entire reversal of the present relations of Right and Wrong, then those terms would change their signification accordingly, because He so willed it. The moral nature within us revoltingly protests against such a monstrous paradox, and cries aloud—"No! He wills only what is Right,—He only wills a thing because it is Right." This is met by the supposed difficulty, that, then, there is something immutable besides God,—some higher standard of action than Himself. Now, on the contrary, it is precisely because He is Himself in His own Perfect Nature the highest and only Standard of Goodness, Right, and Justice, that He exercises no mere arbitrary Will, but regulates and directs it by principles of immutable Rectitude.

Omnipotence alone,—the mere possession of resistless, boundless, physical power,—cannot itself constitute the ground of Right. The very conception of Right implies propriety, fitness, justice, reason. If the mere omnipotent Will of Deity be made the sole ground of Moral Distinctions,—so that whatever conceivable thing He had willed as moral, would therefore have been moral,—what possible assurance could there be, that He might not entirely reverse the whole Moral System of man, and entail the utmost confusion and misery upon the race? Our moral instincts compel us to shrink from the supposition of such a possibility,

and at once to affirm that it is morally impossible, because God is good, and consistent, and just. And here we immediately have another ground for God's moral enactments than mere arbitrary Will,—a ground, in fact, by which that Will is directed. Do we find, moreover, no difficulty,—no moral incongruity,—in the supposition that different, even diametrically opposite, standards of Right and Wrong, may exist in different parts of God's Universe,—as certainly may be the case, if all things are in themselves indifferent until arbitrarily willed to be Right or Wrong? Can we possibly suppose that in some distant Planet idolatry, and blasphemy, and theft, and lying, are the objects of God's complacent delight and approbation? Strangely indeed must we have dimmed and darkened the lamp of our natural Reason, however much already obscured by the dusky atmosphere of sin, if we do not feel an instinctive protest arise within us against such an enormous moral inconsistency.

The very possession of a Nature necessarily involves Laws by which it is governed; and the very fact of Being as necessarily involves the possession of a Nature. God, then, must be a Law unto Himself, and His Will must be directed by the highest Law of Reason and Wisdom. In what do His Goodness and Rectitude consist, which form the strongest grounds of our confidence in Him, if not in the necessities of His own Perfect Nature? How can we be assured that the Judge of the earth *will* do *right*, if anything that He wills is therefore Right, and there be not an eternal Standard of Rectitude in His own Reason and Wisdom which He will not transgress? All things are possible with God. But what are "all things"? Doubtless the

conceptions of His own Infinite Knowledge. Whatever thing is possible—for an impossibility is simply a non-entity—must, by virtue of its existence, have a Nature which constitutes it what it is. While it is only a conception in the Divine Mind, its Nature is only possible. But the moment that the Deity determines—and surely He cannot determine without reason—to give it an actual, objective, existence, it is what it is by virtue of its peculiar, essential, Nature, and not by the mere act of volition which causes that Nature to be realized. As to *why* things should have such and such a Nature,—*why* it should be the Nature of Numbers to possess certain necessary relations,—*why* the Nature of the Circle to involve certain properties necessarily,—this is a matter with which we have nothing to do,—which we cannot fathom, and which we must leave to the inscrutable Reason of the Deity. But whether we choose to *call* Numbers, “numbers” or “pebbles,”—whether we choose to *call* a Circle, a “circle,” or by any other conventional term,—yet these things are what they are by the Laws and Properties of their essential Natures respectively. And God has constituted our Reason conformably thereto, that it is obliged to perceive these Natures as involving their peculiar Laws.

The sum of the angles of a triangle are assuredly not equal to two right angles simply because God willed that they should be; for then might He have willed them to be equal, in one age, to ten, in another, to fifty right angles; but He willed that triangles should be known under those relations, doubtless because from the essential Nature involved in the Conception of the Triangle it could not be otherwise. The Mechanical Laws which regulate the vast machin-



ery of the Universe in such majestic and unutterable harmony, doubtless were not so constituted because God merely arbitrarily willed that such a machine should be made ; but He willed that it should be so framed and supported, because such Mechanical Laws were involved in the Conception, and would be, therefore, the necessary result of the realization of the Matter which He determined to create. The *Nature* of things cannot depend upon the *Will* of God, although their *actual existence* does. Whether things should be called into existence or not, whether the archetypal Ideas of Supreme Knowledge should be realized, for the manifestation of His Glory, doubtless depended absolutely upon the Will of God. But can it be doubted that that Will acted only under the direction of Perfect Wisdom and Reasonable Counsel ? And, therefore, that in giving concrete existence to the Divine Conceptions, it could not have itself given their essential Nature to things ? For, assuredly, although the *names* of things may be varied at pleasure, yet their *Nature*, which constitutes them respectively what they are, is involved in their Conception, and therefore cannot be otherwise than it is ; nor can its properties be changed by mere Will without a radical change of the very essence of the Nature in question, which would make it at once something else. Nor can we for a moment suppose the Deity not eternally and completely in possession of all possible conception, but by a determination of his Will creating the Conception of a Nature which his Reason had not before conceived. "Every thing," says Cudworth, "is what it is immutably by the necessity of its own nature"; and this is much the same as saying, that there is an eternal and

immutable Knowledge and Wisdom in the mind of God, whence the nature of things is determined. Or, that there is an eternal and necessary fitness of things, into the reason of which it is as vain for us to enquire, as it would be to search into the reason which moved the Deity to create, or, more analagously, into the nature of the Ideas and Knowledge of God.

If, then, it is its Nature, as eternally conceived in the Reason of God, which determines the essential character of the thing; so likewise must Right and Wrong, Just and Unjust, Moral and Immoral, like other things and Conceptions, possess their essential Natures which constitute them what they are. They must, thus, ever maintain the same relations to God's Infinite Reason, be eternally distinguished as that Reason is itself eternal and invariable; and knowing what is eternally Right, He has constituted His Moral Law conformably thereto, and imposed it upon His moral creatures because it is Right and Just according to the immutable Principles of His own Upright Nature.

Did we suppose that everything was in itself indifferent; that there is no such thing as the essential nature of things, except as God has arbitrarily willed them to be so; that anything might have been established by the Deity as Truth and Right; that any mathematical principles might have been made the basis of such science, as, for instance, that two and two should be nine, or that any two angles of the triangle should be equal to six right angles; or that anything else might have been established as the nature of Truth and Justice than that which now characterizes them; and, consequently, that if these things are so merely by the Will of God, having been in themselves

indifferent before He willed, then might He now entirely alter everything and make the very reverse to be Truth and Right; it is evident, that in striking so fatal a blow against the validity of our whole intellectual and moral constitution, we should be laying the foundations of the most absolute Scepticism, for there would be no such thing as Eternal, Immutable, and Absolute Truth, or Justice, or Knowledge, in the Universe, since there could be none, upon such a supposition as that mentioned, in God Himself; and everything would be a mere illusion,—the Universe itself a mere kaleidoscope toy of Omnipotence. Wisdom is itself a rule and measure. But Will is indefinite, indeterminate, and therefore to be regulated; and hence while the Will of God is always free, it is never indifferent, but He is invested with that supremest glory of possessing an Omnipotent Will which is ever guided and directed by Absolute Knowledge, Truth, and Wisdom, and which is ever voluntarily coincident with Perfect Reason and Goodness.

The solemn voice of Conscience would be a frightful mocking spectre, did it not imply the reality of a more solemn Obligation, from whose imperative demands no perversion or stifling of Conscience can discharge us. The indestructible sense of Accountability would be an unmeaning enigma, did it not involve the real correlative of Duty; and this itself would be unintelligible, if it did not imply the natural perception of Moral Principle and of relation to a Source of Right, of Authority, and of Law. Daily experience teaches us how sadly blunted the general moral sensibility may become, and how, under the influence of prejudice, passion, and willfulness, a strange obliquity may be impart-

ed to the moral vision on some points, while on others it appears to see correctly and justly. But while it is upon the affections and the will that the perversion of depravity primarily and most heavily falls, it is the rational perception of Moral Truth which renders man capable of receiving the appeal of Revelation to his conscience. It is his fundamental conviction of Moral Obligation which renders possible an appeal to the duty of belief and obedience. That very conviction implies principles of eternal and immutable truth. If there were no conception of the immutable relations of Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, the very root of moral obligation and personal responsibility would be withered; for man could not conceive of holiness or moral perfection or justice as the necessary attributes of the Supreme Being, and he might, consequently, ask, what guarantee he could possibly possess that the very Revelation which claimed his obedience was not the capricious manifestation of some Demiurgos? In short, if there be no fundamentally valid moral convictions in man, he may be the object of coercive power, but he cannot be the responsible subject of Duty. However much, in the ignorance and degradation and impotence of sin, he might need the guidance of Revelation and the regeneration of a perverted will, yet with no rational standard of Right,—no immoveable Moral Perceptions, which, despite sin and a blinded or misguided Understanding, refuse—nay, from the very constitution of man's nature, are not able—to reverse and interchange the relations of Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, Just and Unjust,—man would be beyond the reach of Revelation,—he would be incapable of conceiving the grounds of its appeal, for he would be



able to perceive no incongruity or impossibility in the Deity's contradicting Himself and commanding the most contradictory and inconsistent precepts as His positive Moral Law. The very fact, however, that we cannot conceive this of the Deity, and that Revelation itself presupposes Moral Perceptions in Man, must oblige us to believe that the ground of those Moral Perceptions, the distinction of Right and Wrong, must have its eternal and immutable basis in the Nature and Reason of God.

The Natural or Moral Law, then, is doubtless but a reflection, obscured indeed by Sin, but still a veritable reflection, in the finite image of the Creator, of that Absolute Law of Rectitude which springs from the nature of things, which is founded in Eternal Right, and which is consonant with Everlasting Reason. It is the one solid and massive fragment amidst the ruins of that fair and glorious temple, which man originally presented for the habitation of his Maker's Spirit, upon which the Revelation of Christ founds its work of mercy, for the restoration of that temple in the more glorious majesty of a redeemed image of the Son of God. It is to that, that the Holy Spirit appeals with demonstration and power, to convince the sinner of his ruin, his helplessness, his utter inability to be justified by the Eternal Law, to whose immutable authority his Conscience bears witness, but to whose inevitable, and fatal, and necessary operation, he is awfully exposed. I say necessary operation, for as a Law established by Supreme Wisdom, founded in the eternal fitness of things in relation to the Divine Nature, and hence necessarily involved in the constitution of the Universe, its nature must be necessarily fulfilled, as its

consequences must certainly have been involved in the original conception and determination of the Divine Lawgiver.

With this conception of the Moral Law, it is with awful reverence that we behold it making upon us no arbitrary, partial, claims, which may be satisfied by imperfect obedience, and the consequences of whose infringement may be obviated by anomalous expedients; but its requisitions are uttered with infinite reasonableness, its course sweeps on with immutable necessity, its consequences are entailed with inexorable sequence. Being as much involved in the nature and constitution of things, as is any other Law of the Universe, we dare no more expect it to be variable in its operation, than we can expect the Mechanical Laws of the heavens to be reversed. Nor can we reasonably be more surprised at the inevitable fulfilment of its moral consequences, than we can be at the inevitable consequences of the Law of Gravity. When an individual from a ladder or a lofty roof misses his foothold, the Law of Gravity will not be suspended, even though he has made the misstep by no fault of negligence; but in its established operation, that Law will hurl him to the earth, and he must endure the disastrous consequences, though they may entail distress and want upon a family dependent upon his labor. Is this an enactment of the mere arbitrary Will of God, when, as Omnipotent and Benevolent, He could have averted the calamity? Assuredly not; because that Law itself is not the result of mere arbitrary Will, but it is a necessary consequence of the nature of things, as Eternal Wisdom and Reason have constituted the Universe. So likewise the Moral Law being founded in the eter-

nal nature of Right and Justice, is, in the nature of things, necessarily inflexible and inevitable in its operation, and the terrible consequences of its infraction must necessarily ensue, independent of the arbitrary Will of Deity, as do those of the Law of Gravity. Those consequences are moral ruin,—often physical suffering and intellectual degradation,—remorse, and spiritual death. This can be established, by historical induction from the existing literature of Pagan nations, as well as from various other sources, as being no less the mournful voice of the general convictions of mankind, under almost every variety of religion and condition, than it is the authoritative declaration of Revelation. With an instinctive feeling that Righteousness must be fulfilled,—not mitigated or perverted,—but with a deep consciousness of sin and impotence, all nations and religions have darkly and importunately sought the solution of the great problem—“How can man be justified with God, and thus the piteous ruin of the immortal creature be repaired and healed.” The whole religious development of man indicates a dim consciousness on his part that there must be an eternal Rule of Rectitude in the Divine Mind; for man has not sought in his religious systems and expedients to render God propitious to sin, but, on the contrary, has ever striven to remedy sin, and to place himself in that position which holds towards God the relation of Just. When the sublime Majesty of the Moral Law is thus regarded, founded upon the eternal nature of Moral Distinctions, and as inevitable in its operation as any other of the great Laws involved in the structure of the Universe; we perceive that in its application to a moral creature like man, the idea of Justification is involved as its



necessary correlative. This could have, consequently, been no after-thought, no expedient for remedying a defect, but it must be an essential element of the eternal plan of Divine Wisdom, whereby it is involved in the everlasting nature and immutable fitness of things, that the Righteousness of the Law should be *fulfilled*, and the moral creature be not anomalously *excused* from the demands of that Law, but be *justified* before its inviolate sanctity. But if the distinction of Right and Wrong be not eternal,—if the Moral Law be not necessarily founded in the nature of things, but be solely dependent upon the will of the Lawgiver, then there is no difficulty in supposing that the Lawgiver may, by a mere arbitrary exercise of that will, excuse the violation of the Moral Law, and exempt from the consequences of its infraction, merely upon the condition of penitence, or even upon no condition at all: while upon the contrary view, the *necessity* of Justification is as absolute and eternal as the nature of the Moral Law itself, and can no more be conceived capable of being dispensed with,—without a change and reversal of the whole nature of things and hence of the Ideas of the Divine Wisdom and Reason in which that nature is founded,—than it can be conceived that the planets should pursue an entirely eccentric course, while the Laws which define and produce their present motion are in full and unimpaired operation. True, it can be said that the Deity might have left man with no provision whatever for salvation. That He has not done so, however, is a sufficient proof that what He has done is accordant with and founded in absolute Wisdom and Rectitude; and if Justification be the necessary correlative of the application of the

Eternal Moral Law to a moral creature like man, then we must affirm that if man was saved, Justification was necessary from the nature of things. Hence while the Moral Law, like the Law of Gravity, must, from the nature of things, effect its terrible consequences to the sinner who is under its operation; the unutterable Wisdom, the boundless Love, of the Creator has provided a Physician, a Justifier, a Savior, who can place the sinner in the position of Righteous towards God and His Law, and can exhibit to an adoring Universe the consistent goodness of a Sovereign Lawgiver, who is Just and yet the justifier of those who believe in Jesus.

Our moral relations, then, are not the result of arbitrary enactment,—are not regulated by a law which may be changed by mere Will, so that what now is morally Wrong could ever have been morally Right, or the reverse; but they are founded in the nature of things; the formal precepts of the revealed Positive Law do not themselves make, but they reflect, Right; they enact and forbid because such things are eternally and necessarily Right or Wrong,—since they are founded upon that Moral Law which springs from the changeless Rectitude of God's own Nature, and is the offspring of His Eternal Wisdom and Reason, whose views of Good and Evil, of Right and Wrong, of Just and Unjust, can never vary. Instead of being the creatures of some isolated, peculiar, narrow system, our moral relations connect us with the whole Moral System of the Universe. The great Law of Right,—of Morals,—being founded in the nature of things,—in the Eternal Reason of the Deity,—must be valid throughout the Deity's empire; and it should surely impart increased impulse, dignity and solemn weight, to our conception of Duty and our sense of responsibility, to reflect that

they must be based upon the same Moral Principles which regulate the service of the most glorious archangel ; in short, that we are the subjects of that all-embracing, perfect Law, founded in Absolute Rectitude, Justice, and Wisdom, of which, in language so often quoted that it is almost superfluous to repeat it, but whose eloquent grandeur no repetition can diminish, “no less can be said, than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world ; all things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power ; both angels and men, and the creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent, admiring her as the mother of their peace.”

Magnificent conception ! Sure and eternal ground of unwavering confidence in our Paternal Sovereign ! He holds our everlasting destinies in His omnipotent hand, but He weighs them with Equity and determines them by Law,—not the arbitrary enactment of His irresistible Will, but the reasonable offspring of Sovereign Justice. And JUSTICE herself, the most majestic of Jehovah’s attributes, is nothing less than Goodness conformed to Wisdom. Her essence is the Reason of God ; her dominion hath no limit but the empire of the Universe ; the angels reverently adore her awful majesty ; and man, in his feeble capacity and degree, reflects her image, and strives to ennoble his authority by the impress of her form ; the wicked tremble at the lightning of her eye ; the oppressed take refuge beneath the shadow of her august sceptre ; distributing to each created thing its righteous portion, with Wisdom for her counsellor, and with Love and Mercy as her sisters and assessors, she guides in their appoint-

ed spheres all orders of the Universe, choiring in eternal harmony around the throne of God.

GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS:

Could we confidently expect that, with each and all, life would flow on henceforth serene and unruffled, until each was peacefully borne into the everlasting haven, nothing would remain for me but to bid you onward with blessings and smiles of congratulation. But even the most thoughtless and inexperienced cannot forget that life is no such gentle and sunny stream; and you, Gentlemen, I believe, will heartily assent to the very obvious, but not less important truths, that the Creator has placed us in life to fulfil a useful end of existence; that every moment of continuance upon earth involves duties to God, to our fellow-creatures, and to ourselves; and that whatever worldly prosperity may attend the man who has habitually violated his duty, his lot is not for a moment to be envied in comparison with that of him, who, whatever may have been his trials and calamities, can go to his final account with a reasonable, religious and holy confidence in his God. Such a confidence can only be acquired by the teaching of God's Holy Spirit through the paths of experience; it is only when we realize our need that we will cordially embrace the proffered remedy; and in proportion to the largeness of our conception of the vast demands of God's Holy, Perfect, and Absolute Law, will be the depth of our conviction of the indispensable necessity of a Justifying Saviour.

Commonplace as the words may seem, I will indulge the belief that our relations have been such, as will make you attribute to something more than the stereo-



typed phraseology of the pulpit, the assurance of the deep and earnest and affectionate desire with which I pray for your temporal and eternal happiness. And I should do violence to my feelings, if I did not embrace this opportunity, which I thank you for having afforded me publicly, of expressing the grateful recollection I shall always entertain of the harmonious relations which have characterized our intercourse, unbroken by official difficulty, smoothed by friendly consideration, and cemented, I trust, by mutual esteem. From your class I part with peculiar feelings of interest and regret. With you my duties in the College commenced, and with you first, (for your predecessors were already Seniors when I became connected with the Institution,) I have gone through my imperfect course, at least in one of the subjects committed to me. The inexperience and diffidence of the Professor in his first essay at conducting his course, have been lightened and encouraged by the attention and gentlemanly bearing of the Class; and may God bring forth to the ripe fruit of honorable usefulness in society, the buds of promise which have been so fairly expanding with each successive year in College.

It is with no little satisfaction that I feel excused from urging those counsels which properly belong to the coming hour of our final official connexion, because they will come from one who always imparts to them a noble dignity, wisdom and force, of which anything that I could say, would fall immeasurably short, and which render them worthy of being engraved in your memory as the parting words of your Alma Mater. Only suffer me to say in relation to the great theme, which I am painfully conscious of having presented this evening in a manner far inadequate to its grandeur and impor-

tance, that it would seem to be almost morally impossible for a man who was thoroughly imbued with the conviction of the Eternal Nature of Moral Distinctions, the Everlasting and Immutable difference of Right and Wrong,—True and False,—and the consequent character of Moral Law,—to become a narrow-minded partisan of temporary dogmas, ceremonials, and mere accessories, in one sided parties of either Politics, the Church, or Science. We would expect a man, who was thoroughly alive to those momentous distinctions, to possess a clear and sensitive perception of the difference between what is eternally true and universally applicable, and what is merely proper and becoming, and liable therefore to be modified by circumstances, judgment, and considerations of expediency; and we would not expect such a man to endanger the very ground of all Morals by confusing forms and deductions with essence and first principles, or by basing upon the same sanction of conscience and moral obligation opinions upon which the wise and good may differ, and everlasting truths and principles upon which there can be no difference where the Moral sense is unperverted, and which must be valid wherever there is a reason existing in the Universe to comprehend them. I cannot but remember the remark of Dr. Arnold,—“I long,” says he, “to see something which should solve what is to me the great problem of Hooker’s mind. He is the only man that I know, who, holding with his whole mind and soul the idea of the Eternal Distinction between moral and positive laws, holds with it the love for a priestly and ceremonial religion.” Whatever may be the explanation with regard to Hooker, the whole tenor and teaching of the Inspired Scriptures imply and recognize that Eternal Distinction, and we cannot too earnestly pray

that we may not obscure and hinder the progress of Eternal Truth, by obstinately confounding with it the variable, the contingent, and the unessential. There is a great difference between believing a thing to be true, because it is believed by others, or accords with some theory, and believing a thing because it is true, however it may clash with popular or individual prejudices and opinions. And in proportion to our thorough assurance of the eternal difference between Truth and Falsehood,—between Right and Wrong; in proportion as we are penetrated with the conviction that they are not merely relative and variable, but absolute and immutable in their natures; will be our earnestness in pursuing Truth and Duty,—our lofty and impregnable confidence in the indestructible vital power and the triumph of Truth, which will court the most critical and fearless inquiry, which will tremble at the demolition of no theory, the confutation of which may tend to bring out more clearly the distinction between the essential and the contingent; and as our views become larger, more unprejudiced, and far reaching in their scope, we will be convinced that unreasoning faith, no less than unreasonable scepticism, is a degradation to man, and an insult to the Being who has graciously established progress in the acquisition of Truth as the Law of human development.

And now, Gentlemen, to the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Truth I affectionately commend you, and may “the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever! AMEN.”